



STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
DARRELL V. MCGRAW, JR.
CONSUMER PROTECTION DIVISION
1-800-368-8808 or 304-558-8986

Press Release

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Contact: Michael Thomas

Phone: (800) 368-8808

Attorney General McGraw Leads Pearl Harbor Observance at USS West Virginia Mast and Bell Memorial

MORGANTOWN –West Virginia Attorney General Darrell McGraw will deliver the keynote speech at today's ceremonies at the USS West Virginia Mast and Bell Memorial at West Virginia University observing the 69th anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor.

At 11 a.m. at the memorial on the WVU campus, members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), representatives from the West Virginia Division of Veteran Affairs, and local veterans will join the Attorney General and others in honoring the history of the battleship.

Dedicated on the WVU campus in 1963, the USS West Virginia Memorial has since served as a towering remembrance of the noble service of all West Virginia veterans as it pays silent tribute to the ship and its brave crews. Attorney General McGraw, a WVU alumnus and a veteran, had a direct role in the establishment of the memorial when he was a student at the University in the 1950s.

The USS West Virginia, which was affectionately nicknamed the Wee Vee, was bombed and torpedoed as it sat on Battleship Row during the surprise raid on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. The ship sank, trapping dozens of courageous crew members, but the super-dreadnaught ship's compartmental design – and the special damage control techniques employed by the crew – kept the Wee Vee from capsizing.

After the attack, the ship's port side was repaired at the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard. Its gunnery was updated, its silhouette modified, and the USS West Virginia returned to action and operations in the Pacific. There, the battleship bombarded enemy targets and provided anti-aircraft cover during historic battles at Leyte Gulf, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa.

Following the end of World War II, the Wee Vee sailed back across the Pacific to Puget Sound, where it remained in the naval yard until 1959, when it was retired. That's when the plan to use the ship's mast as part of a memorial was hatched by Joe Gluck, a former Navy chaplain who was WVU's Dean of Students. Gluck felt that the mast of the USS West Virginia would make a fitting memorial at the University.

"I was a Student Body President candidate then," says Attorney General McGraw, "and Dean Gluck enlisted my help to solve the logistical problems of moving the mast to West Virginia." Through the generosity of local veterans and the help of U.S. Senator Jennings Randolph, McGraw and Gluck were able to raise the funds to pay for the move.

"My brother Warren and I arranged for the mast to be transported by train from Washington State to Chicago and on to

Columbus," McGraw continued. "Then, it was moved by truck from Columbus to Charleston and finally to Morgantown.

"The mast and the memorial represent our veterans' unselfish devotion to duty. They help remind us of the acts of heroism at Pearl Harbor that still sit at the core of our country's soul, even after nearly 70 years."

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